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Exploring Professional Development Practices for Vocational Education and Training Practitioners

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Abstract: This paper addresses the practice of professional development within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) arena. The study object was to gain the perceptions held by a selected group of VET educators in the tourism and hospitality sector of the professional teaching/training competencies required for effective practice. The study was conducted utilising narrative inquiry, a qualitative research technique. The investigation concentrated on a case study context of educators currently working within a department of tourism and hospitality at a VET registered training organisation. Interviews were conducted with 10 front-line teaching educators and 4 management Heads of Department. Findings indicated that there was a breadth of professional teaching and training competencies required by VET educators to assist with effective delivery of teaching and learning strategies in the VET sector.

Introduction

The national approach to vocational education and training in Australia has created a call for professional development (PD) on a nation-wide scale (Mitchell & Young, 2001). PD activities maintain proficient industry currency and should be considered to be a fundamental component of any professional's career path. Lifelong learning is perceived to be a key requirement for all, and especially for those who are key stakeholders in the educational development of the next generation. For growth, prosperity and success to occur contemporary organisations have recognised that on-going training and development of their staff is essential. The VET sector is no exception. The challenge of tackling the enormous diversity of the VET workforce must be addressed before effective and long term strategic PD can be implemented at a national level.

The challenge faced by VET systems is how to ensure that there are adequate and effective PD practices available to all educators over the duration of their teaching careers. Harris, Simons, Hill, Smith, Pearce, Blakeley, Choy and Snewin (2001) and Smith (1997) affirmed that it is vital for VET educators to maintain and update their skills and knowledge to tackle the continual changes in the world of work, ongoing reform and increased competition in the VET training sector. The problems of how to provide adequate and effective PD to educators are reflective of concerns experienced by technical educators on a worldwide basis. Loveder (2005) discussed a range of factors impacting on staff development for technical educators: "These factors include changes in clients, recent advances in technology, the growth of the knowledge economy, flexible approaches to

teaching and learning and work intensification" (p. 2). Loveder's factors are also a predicament faced in the Australian training arena.

Professional Development Literature

Adult Learning Theory

Understanding adult learning theory and principles is essential to fully appreciate the challenges attributed to PD. John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1894, was one of the first to explore educational philosophy and adult learning. He developed a number of key concepts of education. The central concept was learning comes from experience. Experience provides a platform for problem solving and solving problems leads to growth and change. Burns (2002) recalled that Dewey perceived a teacher to have a specific role when facilitating the learning of others:

- Being aware of the capacity, needs and past experience of those under instruction
- Using environment and experiences as a basis for learning
- Taking a guiding and cooperative role
- Ensuring learning experiences are constructive to growth (p. 240).

The educator is an instrument to assist with the learning experience and is not the font of all knowledge. Learning for adults is obtained from past knowledge which is adapted and transformed to move forward to newly acquired knowledge.

J Robbins Kidd, a Canadian scholar extended the examination of adult learning during the 1970s. He was fascinated with the meaning of learning both individually and in a social context. He concluded that learning for all humans is "wholly a natural impulse" of the living organism (cited in Thomas, 1987, p. 169). Kidd (1973) asserted that adults are capable of independent learning and do not require force and persuasion to learn. Learning is something that comes naturally, especially when a participant is provided with the appropriate stimulus. It could be suggested that VET educators in the current working environment of continual change are seeking skills and knowledge to assist them to overcome workplace challenges and difficulties. If VET management provides access to relevant PD activities, VET educators are more likely to embrace the chance to learn and acquire further skills and knowledge to support them in the workplace.

Access to PD encourages VET educators to enhance their skills and knowledge in a variety of areas and to keep in step with changes in their industry discipline and their teaching competencies. These teaching competencies range from classroom-related teaching skills through to administrative requirements prevalent since the introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards in 2001.

Knowles (1984) believed that adults undertake a form of learning due to pressure from a current life situation. An adult will be willing to learn a new process in order to be able to solve a prevailing problem that faces them. This willingness to learn can be translated in the workplace as a PD practice that will equip the educator with solutions to workplace predicaments. Adult workers are continually faced with new challenges in the work environment and following the principles of Knowles these challenges provide motivation to learn how to overcome the current difficulties. Under these circumstances adults are able to take responsibility for their own learning. These challenges encourage and

motivate an adult to obtain relevant and beneficial information that may be applied to their workplace predicament and improve work practices.

Knox (1986) argued that adult learners demonstrate a number of different characteristics when it comes to learning. These relate to past experience, current abilities and roles and future aspirations. Management within the VET sector could be more responsive to the current needs of VET educators by providing PD that facilitated the closure of individual employee's skills and knowledge deficiencies. Mitchell and Young (2001) suggested a number of areas that need to be addressed in respect of the deficiencies of skills and knowledge of VET educators. These included skills for on-line delivery; workplace training and assessment; skills development for casual staff and the expansion of management competencies.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning incorporates PD practices conducted by an individual over the duration of their life. The PD may be organised by the individual or controlled and structured by the organisation at which the individual is employed. The workforce of the new millennium can no longer work under the assumption that initial education acquired in youth will provide the required learning for a lifetime. Technological advances and the rapid and continuous changes at the workplace have provided an arena where learning throughout the entire life span is essential to keep abreast of ever increasing changes in professional practice.

Lifelong learning is the concept of continual development of individuals well past the mandatory secondary education requirements. Individuals welcome learning opportunities and continue to keep pace with the ever changing work environment. Individuals adopt the position of continually updating or learning new skills and knowledge to keep currency in his/her chosen career path. The philosophy of lifelong learning needs to permeate the culture of the organisation.

The ultimate outcome of education is the progress and development of the learner. A major contributor, however, to this development is the learning undertaken by the educator. If an educator is professionally fulfilled and demonstrates skills, knowledge and job satisfaction then they are more likely to motivate their students to learn (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Educators can provide a role model for their students. Highly motivated people have the tendency to motivate others. When an educator displays passion for their discipline and also for the learning environment of the students, this passion about their subject matter supplies the ingredients to build a learning culture, which may translate into lifelong learning inclinations. Knapper and Cropley (2000) reinforced this concept and suggested that it is essential for an educator to display passion and curiosity for their professional practice, thus exhibiting characteristics of a lifelong learner.

Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) recognised that people work smarter when they are encouraged to build skills and competence, and work harder when they have more control and choice in their work. Unfortunately, training is often treated as an added extra and is the area to be cut back when economic rationalism looms over the organisation. Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) regarded training as providing an organisation with a competitive edge, if implemented effectively. They maintained there is a connection between management placing an emphasis on putting people first in the organisation and the ultimate success of the organisation. Investing in employee development will eventually pay dividends. Nadler

and Nadler (1994) suggested that there is a direct correlation between enhancement of job performance and the learning that comes from training.

Learning Contracts

Byrne (2001) advised there might be a paradox between individual development and the development of the organisation. If an individual acquires improved skills and knowledge, they may have the tendency to leave the organisation for a better position or be more desirable to a competitor because of their increased marketability. This paradox poses the question of how to motivate employees to remain loyal to their current employer. Byrne (2001) recommended a correlation between the individual's learning and the strategic goals of the employing organisation. The employing organisation could facilitate any learning in parallel to the immediate targets of the organisation. Knowles (1975) proposed the implementation of a learning contract that sets the boundaries for mutual gain and cooperation. Carl Rogers also believed in a learning contract arrangement between the learner and teacher in which the learner could negotiate their own learning and be self-directed in the learning activity (Burns, 2002).

A learning contract, or in this case a PD contract, can reflect a correlation between the individual's learning needs and the organisational goals (Byrne, 2001). Organisations should facilitate any PD learning in parallel with the goals of the organisation. A learning contract could be developed between employer and employee, where each works towards common goals and agreed objectives. A VET educator could establish a PD contract or yearly plan with their employer which enhances the organisation's goals as well as the educator's career aspirations. Further to the notion of learning contracts, Ellyard (1998) advocated "the importance of also establishing a workplace learning culture, to stimulate a desire in all employees to follow lifelong learning principles" (p. 73).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning practices provide an environment where the participant experiences the learning on a first-hand basis and is immersed in the learning experience. Many PD activities incorporate experiential learning as a component of the learning. Teaching practicums or simulated teaching activities enhance and assist learning and are traditionally incorporated in formal education degrees.

Experiential learning concepts are implied where the learner is able to learn by doing the actual activity in a real world environment. Carl Rogers (1969), a respected humanist, claimed "I know that I can't teach anyone anything. I can only provide an environment in which he/she can learn" (p. 163). Experiential learning provides that environment where the learner can become the master of their own learning.

The experiential learning concept underpins the current delivery model in the VET sector. The emergence of Industry Training Packages in the late 1990s has guided vocational education techniques. This application of experiential learning concepts has translated into workplace learning becoming an integral component of the model. Training Packages provide a flexible arrangement for skills delivery and incorporate both classroom and workplace delivery strategies. VET educators require access to PD that will equip them

with industry currency and strategies to apply effective learning principles into their professional practice, and that of the learner.

Direct experience or experiential learning within a discipline has been used in many fields for a number of years. In the case of educators who specialise in the training of a particular industry, it would seem appropriate that they are required to participate in a form of direct experience to obtain skills and knowledge to keep up-to-date with associated changes and developments.

Professional Development and Professional Learning

Professional learning (PL) could be considered as an effective extension of PD. PL occurs when a participant is able to implement and make changes to their work practices on a continuing basis. In many cases the terms PD and PL can be interchanged but for this paper, there is an important difference between the two. The definition of PL has been further defined as any PD that subsequently translates into applied learning and effective outcomes for the participant involved in the learning process (Caciattolo, Cherednichenko, Eckersley, Jones, Kruger, Moore, Mulraney, Watt & Cosgrove, 2006). In the case of an educator, PL may also enhance the learning outcomes of the educator's students. A PL experience rather than a PD experience is a more effective outcome for a learning organisation. A successful learning organisation needs to concentrate on achieving PL experiences for the employees, not just PD experiences.

It is essential for VET educators to maintain and update their skills and knowledge and to be able to tackle the continual changes in work caused by ongoing reform and increased competition in the VET training sector (Harris et al., 2001, Smith, 1997). Therefore, it is essential that any form of PD is effective and realises the quantifiable objective outcomes. Harris et al. (2001) indicated that "currently most staff development is conducted ad hoc with little or no consistency" (p. 23). There is a need for greater emphasis on specific programs that will provide educators with technical competence as well as their professional teaching/training competencies. Basu (1997) recommended that "PD programs require some flexibility in content, duration and place of study" (p. 41). The learner should be able to select the content according to their individual job requirements in order to gain maximum motivation and participation in the program and obtain a PL experience.

Hill and Sims (1997) advocated that an educator's PD should be much more than education and training. PD can embrace the development of educators at the professional, personal, entrepreneurial and general levels. PD can provide educative experiences that are not just restricted to current or future roles, but which cater for the reality that the nature of work is in a state of considerable change. PD can assist an educator to keep up to date with current teaching and learning strategies, industry trends and increase motivation and (where necessary) rejuvenate the educator. Educators, who participate in worthwhile PL can enhance their future value in the employment market place.

Barriers to Professional Development

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) proposed that adults may possess barriers to learning participation. The two most cited reasons for non-participation in extra learning activities were "lack of time and money" (p. 56). These barriers need to be considered when structuring any PD program. Adult learners possess a number of other barriers in respect to

furthering their education: attitudes, perceptions and expectations of the learning experience (O'Mahony, 1997, Darkenwald, 1980). These barriers can be further exacerbated by an individual's lack of confidence in their own learning abilities and the fact they may consider themselves as too old (Cross, 1981).

Obtaining effective PD can be fraught with obstacles and problems. Reed, Forwood and Reed (2003) and Harris et al., (2001) identified a number of common barriers to PD. Harris et al. (2001) suggested that there was a lack of time available for educators to complete a PD activity. Management was not always supportive and did not have the expertise to properly manage PD requests to provide adequate time release. The vision to see the benefits associated with effective staff development was absent because the organisational culture did not assist in encouraging effective staff development strategies. The VET workforce is an aging one and many of the cohorts are resistant to completing any new training activity. One key barrier to PD proposed by Harris concerns the fact that the workforce has become increasingly casualised and many educators are sessional or have fixed term contracts and acquires a secondary place to the main full-time staff in respect to PD access.

If the reality of staffing in the VET sector involves increased casualisation and fixed term contract employment arrangements, it will be difficult to facilitate effective training for all VET educators. The Australian National Training Authority (2003) suggested that there is less support for training of part-time and casual employees in VET education. Thus, the evidence suggests that with increased employment of casual workers there is a decrease in the funds invested in training. Therefore, there appears to be a lack of clarity about who has the responsibility for PD of sessional staff.

Teaching in the Tertiary Sector – VET

Educators in the VET sector provide delivery and assessment in vocational competencies. The current profile of a VET student is predominately a student who has come straight from the secondary school. Their ages range from late teens to early 20s. The VET educators' role is to equip these students with the skills and knowledge to prepare them for a career in their chosen vocation. These students are now considered to be studying in a tertiary "adult learning" environment (Knowles, 1984). There is still a number of issues concerning these students that need to be addressed by a VET educator and their employer. These issues include understanding different approaches to teaching, overall classroom management including handling challenging behaviour, counselling skills, and current legislative and compliance requirements. The educator is required to manage the learning environment and possess the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform their teaching obligations to a satisfactory standard to maximise effective learning for all student participants (Armitage, Bryant, Dunnill, Hayes, Hudson, Kent, Lawes & Renwick, 2003). PD activities undertaken by a VET educator need to include training about how to deal with these issues.

Method

Narrative inquiry was employed in this study to facilitate the collection of individual experiences of PD practice in the VET arena to assist in the development of key

recommendations for effective PD procedures at local and national levels. Gall, Gall and Borg (2005) define a narrative as:

A form of reporting qualitative research study that uses poems, stories, folk tales, anecdotes, or other literary genres to describe research procedures or findings. It is a method of synthesizing qualitative research findings that involves using a consistent writing style to create a brief description of each study (p. 552).

Qualitative research methods were applied to accumulate the primary data for this research. Qualitative methods are predominantly oriented towards exploration and discovery of social phenomena through the use of inductive processes (Mininichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995). Qualitative research offers the opportunity to explore the rich contextual elements central to this type of study (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The study deliberately set out to investigate and examine the real world practices of VET educators (Patton, 1990).

The study was operationalised by collecting data over the following 2 stages:

Stage One: Individual Interviews with Front-Line Staff

Five individual interviews of one-hour were conducted with educators who were employed full-time with a minimum of 3 years teaching experience. Their major role was to provide teaching delivery. Five TAFE institutes were represented in the full-time educators' sample.

Five individual interviews of 1 hour were conducted with educators who were employed on a sessional basis with a minimum of 1 year teaching experience. Their major role was to provide teaching delivery.

Stage Two: Individual Interviews with Management

After completing Stage 1 of data collection, four individual one-hour interviews were conducted with VET managers. The managers were classified as Heads of Department (HODs) and were predominantly responsible for the operational aspects of VET department administration.

Participants' personal career journeys with specific focus on any professional development undertaken prior to and during their teaching career were revealed to the researcher via semi structured interviews. These career journeys formed a set of individual portraits of each educator's vocational history.

The study focused on one educational sector, Vocational Education and Training, in one State in Australia, Victoria, with a small number of participants: 14 educators. The sample size was small and it inadvisable to draw generalization from the findings.

Results and Recommendations

The study objective was to gain the perceptions held by a selected group of VET educators in the tourism and hospitality sector of the professional teaching/training competencies required for effective practice. All participants were questioned about their opinions concerning the key teaching competencies required for a VET educator. It became evident that many of the responses were common across the three educator categories: full-time educators, sessional educators and HODs.

The study participants indicated that there was a large range of professional teaching and training competencies required by VET educators. These competencies can be obtained progressively over the career of a VET educator. Some may be via a formal

qualification others competencies are gained while completing other PD activities and some competencies are gained on-the-job through practical experience.

A taxonomy of educator teaching and training competencies was developed from six constructs identified by the study participants. The constructs and teaching competencies are listed in Table 1.

Constructs	Teaching Competencies
A. Students	Student engagement
	Student welfare and counselling
	Teaching international students
B. Teaching and learning	Classroom management skills
	Organisation, preparation and time management
	Research skills
	Delivery and assessment strategies
C. VET	Understanding curriculum and Training Packages
	Possessing an understanding of the VET: big picture
	Possessing a working knowledge of AQTF requirements and identifying compliance regulations
D. Content	A sound knowledge of the subject area – industry skills and knowledge
E. Administration	Knowledge of institute procedures and policies
F. Information technology	Computer literacy – e.g. developing online delivery, developing classroom resources, email communication, entering results

Table 1: Taxonomy - Constructs and teaching competencies

Each construct will be examined fully in the following section of the paper.

Students

Within the broad construct “students”, data concerning the skills and knowledge of the educator in responding to the needs of the student cohort is discussed within 3 main competencies: student engagement; student welfare and counselling; and teaching international students.

Student Engagement

Three participants highlighted the importance of engaging students in their learning to increase the desire and motivation of the student to learn. Communication, interpersonal skills and a proficiency in English were identified as important skills to facilitate the learning process. Students who are engaged in the learning activity are more likely to retain the material and information that is being delivered because they become interested in the subject matter. Developing a ‘connection’ with the student was considered important for all educators. A participant stated: “keeping a group engaged … is the single greatest

challenge for a teacher... making it interesting" (Interview, Mary, March 2005).

Educators need to be familiar with and capable of implementing a range of teaching and learning strategies to foster student engagement. These techniques could include group work, problem solving, task-centred activities or inquiry based research. Educators can apply experiential learning practices which foster an environment where the participant experiences the learning on a first hand basis and is immersed in the learning experience. Students are more likely to become engaged in their learning when they understand why they need to learn and learning is linked to real life situations (Knowles, 1984). Educators today need PD that broadens their teaching repertoires and leads to PL by engaging students and enhancing student learning.

Student Welfare and Counselling

The front-line educators indicated there was a need for educators to care about their students. "Educators have to have the students' interests at heart" (Interview, Mary, March 2005). Educators are often called upon to provide counselling to students on their career aspirations and other more personal issues (Armitage et al., 2003). Educators require access to PD experiences that will provide them with skills and knowledge to be able to evaluate difficult situations that might be distracting students from their studies. If an educator is not able to provide advice (perhaps due to a lack of professional counselling training) then it is important that the educator is able to recognise the limitations of their role. Appropriate PD activities can provide an educator with fundamental skills and knowledge to handle basic counselling situations with confidence. Confronting students' personal issues can increase the educator's stress level if they do not have the appropriate skills and knowledge to know when to refer the student to a more appropriate person or service that might be able to assist with their often complex personal issues.

There was a discrepancy about the necessity of these skills, since none of the HODs mentioned counselling skills or caring about the students' welfare as a quality required by an educator. This lack of appreciation of counselling skills may have occurred because in the day-to-day working practices of a HOD they are not focusing on front-line skills required by educators. Many HODs take a step back from contact with students and may not realise that in recent years students are requesting more and more personal attention from the front-line classroom educator.

Teaching International Students

Two study participants indicated there was a requirement for an educator to understand and be able to relate to international students. Many institutes now have a growing cohort of students coming from overseas to study in Australia. Educators need adequate training to manage issues associated with different international cohorts. Knowledge and skills in cultural sensitivity and awareness of where the students come from need to be available. Teaching strategies that support the delivery of material to a group of English as a Second Language (ESL) students is essential. If institutes continue to enrol large international cohorts of students then the provision of relevant educator PD is a priority. Increasing cultural awareness will assist educators to create a learning environment which is accessible and engaging for all learners.

Teaching and Learning

The teaching and learning construct focuses on the skills and knowledge required by an educator to provide a suitable and adequate learning environment for all students. Competency requirements in the areas of: classroom management; organisation; preparation and time management; research skills and delivery and assessment strategies was highlighted by the study participants.

Classroom Management

Classroom management was identified as a major concern for the educators in the VET sector. A large percentage of students come straight from the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) studies and do not exhibit mature learning behaviours. Post-VCE students require a certain level of classroom management, until they adapt to a post compulsory learning environment. Participants stated: "classroom management and in particular being flexible, adaptable and being able to manage a changing learning environment are important" (Interview, Giuseppe, November 2004). "An educator is required to possess strategies to deal with difficult situations" (Interview, Elizabeth, June 2004).

These assertions were reiterated by other participants, especially those who were full-time educators. This consensus amongst the educators may be due to the fact that full-time educators in the TAFE sector spend at least 21 hours per week face to face in the classroom with students. Good classroom management provides an environment which fosters the capacity for learning for all students. Disruptions and a lack of classroom control can inhibit the learning process. Armitage et al., (2003) discussed similar requirements for teachers in the post-compulsory education arena in the United Kingdom. Effective classroom management skills are essential to maximise effective learning by providing a functional learning environment for all.

Organisation, Preparation and Time Management

Possessing skills in time management, being organised and well prepared were highlighted by all HODs and three of the front-line educators as key competencies for a VET educator. HODs suggested that they were looking for these skills in the recruitment process. For an educator to provide effective learning for their students, it is necessary to plan and prepare in advance. Effective delivery and timing in the classroom is also essential. An educator must have sufficient and varied learning opportunities planned to engage students in the content of the lesson. Fully prepared educators must be able to adapt and moderate their delivery to meet the needs of the learners. When an educator is organised and well prepared for their lesson delivery they project a demeanour of self confidence and this confidence influences the attitudes of their students.

Research Skills

The ability to conduct research was mentioned by two HODs. They pointed out that a VET educator must be able to research and reflect upon current industry and educational

advances. To keep abreast of current practices, educators must be able to identify new resources and incorporate them into the classroom environment. Contemporary VET educators are expected to continually reflect on and up-date their skills and content knowledge using appropriate research processes.

Delivery and Assessment Strategies

The ability to develop delivery and assessment strategies relevant to the learning context were skills identified as essential educator competencies. Without these teaching and learning skills it would be difficult to function effectively as an educator. Educators have “to be able to identify the objectives of the class and translate them into learning outcomes for the students” (Interview, James, August 2004). An educator is required to prepare material for the classroom and then develop appropriate strategies to assess the students’ learning and competency standard. Armitage et al., (2003) indicated that an educator needs the skills and knowledge to produce assessment strategies that measure student learning outcomes and are valid and reliable.

VET

The VET construct is concerned with VET-specific skills and knowledge required by an educator to effectively work within this education sector. The VET construct has been categorised in the following competencies: understanding curriculum and Training Packages; possessing an understanding of VET in the “big picture” context, and processing a working knowledge of the current AQTF requirements.

Curriculum and Training Packages

Participants from each educator category indicated that it is essential for a VET educator to understand and be able to interpret the relevant Training Package for their industry. The Training Package provides the guidelines to prepare, deliver and assess each unit of study. “A VET educator has to have a good understanding of the curriculum so that he/she can plan what has to be covered in the course” (Interview, Sarah-Anne, November 2004). The Training Package is the blueprint detailing the elements and performance criteria to be covered in the delivery. It is the guide book of the educator.

VET: The Big Picture

“VET: the big picture” refers to where the VET sector is positioned in the current educational environment. VET is a component of the post secondary education arena. With the growth in the economy in the last decade there are greater demands for skilled employees. The VET sector is able to assist in producing these workers:

Each year, the publicly funded training system educates more than 1.7 million Australians, an increase of half a million people since 1995. The system has grown in sophistication and prestige...and is increasingly a first choice for many of the 70% of young Australians who do not go

directly from school to university (Department of Education and Training, 2005, p. iv).

It is this growth that has altered the educational focus of state and federal government to view the VET system more favourably when deciding on funding initiatives. The current political climate has recognised that there are many industry skill gaps in the Australian workforce and the VET system must be responsive to the ever changing needs of industry by providing high quality vocational training.

None of the front-line staff mentioned the “big picture of VET” in their interview discussion, while three of the HODs suggested that an educator should understand the “big picture of VET”. Mark suggested that acquainting staff with the “bigger picture of VET” (Interview, Mark, August 2005) was important. He indicated that educators lacked of knowledge in this area.

There is scope to improve the image of VET through relevant PD that informs VET educators about the importance and relevance of vocational education and training in the present growing economy. Educators can also value where the VET sector is positioned in the larger educational arena.

Australian Quality Training Framework

All the HODs indicated that knowledge of the AQTF requirements was essential. However, only two of the front-line educators mentioned this requirement in their interview. This difference might be explained by the fact that the HODs had a greater focus on making sure that all policies and procedures, especially government compliance standards, were followed. The institute and the educator have a responsibility for VET educational compliance.

Content

The content construct is aligned with the technical competencies of VET educators. The concept of content is concerned with the industry technical skills and knowledge which a VET educator typically acquires prior to commencing a teaching career. Educators in the hospitality and tourism sector are expected to have worked and/or studied in their field prior to commencing a teaching career. Acknowledging that industry is rarely static, an educator is required to continually keep conversant with changes and innovations in that industry. The educator is providing skills and knowledge to the next generation of industry skilled graduates and thus there is a responsibility for them to facilitate suitable learning that will equip the students with current and future insights into industry practices.

The AQTF 2007 (DEST,2007) standards require a trainer or assessor to be able to demonstrate vocational competencies at least to the level of those being delivered and assessed. There is no minimum years of experience denoted. One HOD indicated that “a minimum of five years industry experience was required” before starting a teaching position (Interview, Mark, August 2005).

The HOD proposed there was a need to include PD activities that could assist the educator in returning to industry and familiarising themselves with current industry trends. The PD activity would enable the educator to spend time back in an industry work place. This type of PD updates educators about current industry trends and developments and

Williams (2000) argues this should be on a regular basis.

Administration

The administration construct is concerned with the administrative duties that VET educators are required to perform as part of their position descriptions. Three interview participants indicated the necessity to understand the administrative functions required in their institute. One HOD pinpointed occupational health and safety issues as an important area to fully understand and the others spoke of other institute specific policies and procedures. The administration requirements of educators have increased over the past decade. AQTF requirements have expanded the quantity of required paperwork and compliance within the VET sector (DEST, 2007). Educators must have access to relevant PD that enables them to not only be aware of the requirements but also to be able to meet any compliance.

Information Technology

The information technology construct is concerned with information technology being used by an educator in their day-to-day operations. Many of the participants indicated that a good working knowledge of computers and being computer literate were essential in their working environment. At the simplest level, educators are expected to prepare classroom material and provide handouts that are generated via computer technology. Three of the HODs indicated a sound understanding of computers was a skill they looked for when hiring staff. "An educator is required to have competent computer skills" (Interview, Jack, June 2005). Lynne agreed, indicating that educators should "possess current technology and industry techniques" (Interview, Lynne, July 2005).

In recent years, there has been a move to provide more flexible learning delivery for tertiary students. The expansion of the Internet has made the World Wide Web more accessible to all and provided another platform for learning. Students can now access their education via e-learning tools in a virtual classroom. Sigala (2002) explained that tourism and hospitality educators will need to examine how online learning can be best facilitated and managed. Knowledge of online learning strategies will require the continual up-skilling of educators in order for them to apply these new technologies to enhance student learning.

The acquisition of these skills and knowledge may commence at the initial teacher training stage, while completing the Certificate IV in Assessment and Training and further refine when completing a diploma or degree of education. Effective PD practices will also assist an educator to gradually develop further comprehension and deeper understanding in specific aspects of these teaching competencies.

Conclusion

In conclusion PD strategies are needed to assist with the processes of energising teaching and training approaches applied in the VET sector. Without continual enlightenment of educators' skills and knowledge in both the technical competency of their chosen discipline and in their teaching competencies, educators will become stagnant and

fall behind in their professional practice. The results of this study assisted in the construction of a taxonomy of teaching and training competencies which has increased the understanding of the necessary skills and knowledge required by VET educator to perform teaching duties effectively. This paper has examined a number of important concerns and issues arising from current PD practice in the VET sector. These concerns need to be taken into consideration when developing future PD strategies at a local and national level.

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